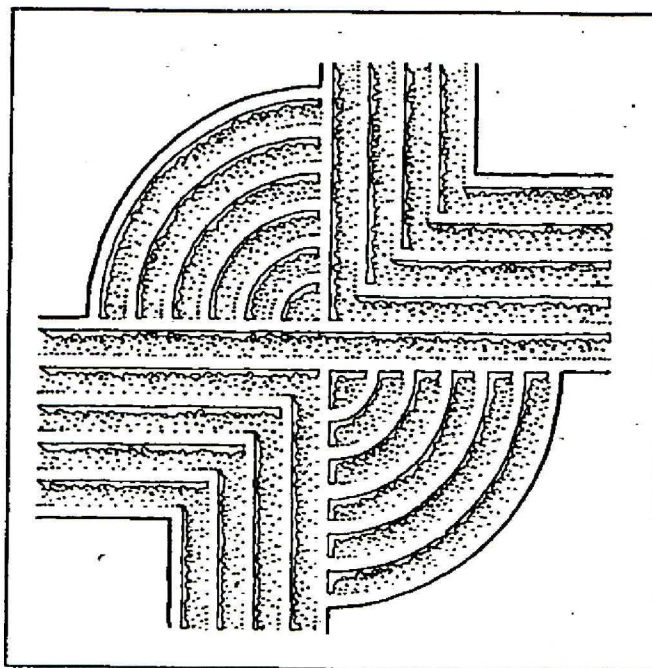


SEARCHING FOR THE PAST: CHILDREN IN ARCHAEOLOGY



RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 105

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CHILDREN IN ARCHAEOLOGY**

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Chicora Research Contribution 105

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Last year I spoke to you about the work Chicora does across the state with our classroom programs. This year, with the generous support of Roche Carolina, Inc., the international pharmaceutical firm, we were able to begin our latest public education program, called "Searching for the Past."

This program has been designed to meet a growing need in South Carolina. As we teach more kids, and their teachers, about the importance of archaeology in this state, the more eager they are to witness, if not participate in, our field work.

Our intention with this program was to bring classrooms of children and teachers to a working site, in this case, the Roche Carolina site in Florence. This was ideal for our purposes, as the kids were able to visit both a prehistoric and a historic site in the process of excavation. The prehistoric component, 38FL249, included a Native American occupation dating from the Early Archaic through the Late Woodland, about 8,000 B.C. to about A.D. 1000. The historic site, 38FL240, was a slave settlement that was later occupied by freedmen tenant farmers. The kids were also able to observe REAL archaeologists doing REAL archaeology, and were allowed to ask them questions as they worked. Artifacts from the sites were arranged in trays on a table along the dirt road and the kids were encouraged to touch and discuss the artifacts and how each one helped to tell us more about the people who lived and worked at the sites. Students were also introduced to the concepts of conservation and curation of archaeological objects, and the responsibility each archaeologists has to preserve these artifacts for future generations.

Much to the kids' delight, they were invited to assist us in surface collecting, which they did on the dirt roads leading to the sites. As the weather was often rainy and windy, new artifacts were revealed daily for this project.

Some of the older students were able to spend more time at the site, allowing them the opportunity to participate in actual fieldwork. We set out a 10 by 10 foot square at the historic site, with hand screens, and archaeologists assisted the kids in excavating the unit. While there were many students who had looked forward to this project, it often amazed teachers to see certain students enthusiastically digging or screening, students who were otherwise labeled "lazy," "bored," or "unmotivated" in the classroom.

The most important aspect of this educational project was that nothing was pre-arranged, or "seeded," for the students. This was reality-based education, and the students were able to experience first-hand the hardships and the thrills of archaeology. Some of these students will remember the hardships more than anything else: the cold, the wind, the mud, the long walk down dirt roads to see sites, and back again to the parking area. Others will remember the thrill of visiting an undeveloped area, the wonder of seeing a

chimney standing alone in a clearing, the last remnant of a slave house, or touching objects that were used by a people a hundred or a thousand years ago.

The most important thing is that they **will remember**; from now on, whenever they read or hear about archaeology, the memories of the Roche Carolina site will come back to them.

The "Searching for the Past" education program lasted five weeks at the Roche Carolina site, concluding one week before the end of the archaeological project. In those five weeks over 1000 kids and over 150 teachers and parents were able to participate in our program, from enthusiastic third graders to sophisticated high school students.

We also developed a curricula guide for teachers based on the site. This guide, available to any school teacher, has been carefully designed to be used by teachers of grades three through twelve. It includes an easily read history of the sites involved in this program, as well as activity sheets for use in the classroom, which range from word puzzles to map reading to economics. Although of particular interest to classes that visited the sites, the guide is presented in such a way that it is also easily used by teachers that did not have the opportunity to visit the site, but need the materials to integrate archaeology into their curriculum.

The curricula guide is expected to be used by teachers for four years before being discarded in favor of new materials. At last count, the guide had been provided to over 75 teachers and schools. With each teacher teaching social studies, history or geography four times a day, and each class having an average of 30 kids, this translates into potentially 36,000 children being exposed to archaeology as a regular part of their education in the next four years.

Children and their teachers are our most important audience in "Searching for the Past." But that does not mean we ignore the general public, who may not have the opportunity to participate in our program. We have discovered that by working closely with both the print and the television media, we are able to reach a large segment of the population. For example, our excavations and educational program were covered by two commercial television stations, WBTW (Channel 13 - CBS) and WPDE (Channel 15 - ABC). While it may be difficult to judge the impact of this coverage, we can say that according to the Neilson and Arbitron ratings, over 230,000 households were exposed to these television programs.

Of more significance may be the South Carolina Educational Television program which was based on Chicora's work at the site and with the school kids. That program was found to be so successful that it is to be followed by a second program on the analysis and conservation of the artifacts. Although these are significant television segments in their own right, our hope is that the two programs will be combined on one tape and made available to public schools throughout the state. This would add yet another dimension to the materials available for teachers.

The key to the success of this educational program, as with any program, is in the planning. Chicora works very closely with students and teachers throughout the school year, and we are aware of both their needs and requirements. In creating "Searching for the Past" we met those requirements, which included adherence to state guidelines, as well as needs. Teachers' needs include easily read, easily adaptable, thorough curricula materials; curricula materials that are readily available and can be used more than once; hands-on participation by students; a professional, caring staff that is experienced in working with children; and class or student projects that carry the program beyond the site.

In short, "Searching for the Past" was a very successful program and one that we hope to continue in the future. Our biggest drawback was lack of time. Although we knew there was a need for a program like this, we underestimated the sheer numbers of schools that wanted to participate, and were unfortunately unable to accommodate all of them. However, as programs like ours, and we hope others, are developed, all schools, and all children will have the opportunity to be exposed to the archaeology and heritage of South Carolina.

In retrospect, this has been one of the most carefully developed and far-reaching educational programs Chicora has undertaken. We have not only received praise from teachers, parents, and children, but have been recognized by our colleagues for our work. We have been invited to participate in a national conference on historic site interpretation, using this program as an example of how archaeological research can be successfully interpreted to the public.

Most importantly, through our "Searching for the Past" program, we have taken another step in bringing archaeology to the public. And if we aren't sharing our research with the public, why are we doing it?